

UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

OF

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FOR

APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR COLLECTION AND DISPOSAL OF
WASTE-WATER AND DEBRIS FROM HEAT EXCHANGER TUBES
AND OTHER SOURCES

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to the art of cleaning the interior surface of heat exchanger tubes, and in particular to disposal of water and debris issuing from heat exchanger tubes in the course of cleaning the tubes. The invention may also be applied in the collection and disposal of liquids and related debris from building leaks, failed equipment and so forth.

In order to maintain thermodynamic efficiency in industrial and commercial shell and tube heat exchange equipment it is necessary periodically to clean the interior surface of the tubes. Commercially available tube cleaning machines utilize rotary brushes affixed to an end of a rotating drive shaft together with a stream of cleaning water. In use of the machine, the rotating brush with following water flow passes into and back out of each tube being cleaned. Each tube in a heat exchanger is individually cleaned in this manner.

When the rotating brush is withdrawn from a cleaned tube a column of water and debris exits the tube ahead of the brush splashing down the tube sheet and spilling onto the heat exchanger support beams as well as on the floor below the heat exchanger. Heat exchanger tubes are cleaned as desired but a mess results outside the heat exchanger.

There is need for efficient collection and disposal of

water and debris removed from heat exchanger tubes in a tube cleaning operation.

The present invention is directed to an apparatus and method for collecting water and debris exiting from cleaned tubes and for directing such water and debris to a floor drain or sewer.

In other applications, the invention may be used for collection and disposal of fluid and related debris when leaks occur, or equipment fails and so forth.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with the apparatus and method of the present invention, water and debris exiting a tube ahead of a cleaning brush are collected in a large flexible plastic bib that is conical or funnel shaped with its large open end positioned near the tubes and its small open end positioned to direct water and debris toward a floor drain. In a preferred arrangement of the invention, the bib is mounted on a rectangular frame to set-up and maintain its collection opening in front of a heat exchanger tube sheet so as to catch and dispose of tube cleaning water and debris forced from each tube as a cleaning brush is extracted from the tube. The frame is provided with mounting means preferably in the form of spaced elongate brushes affixed to a side of the frame. The plastic collection bib and is positioned

relative to tube ends by inserting the spaced brushes into a heat exchange tube so as to position the collection bib opening more or less centrally of a section of tubes being cleaned. The bib and its mounting frame are moved from position to position along the tube sheet until the all of the heat exchanger tubes are cleaned. When so positioned the collection bib catches water and debris exiting from the tubes and drains the water and debris to a floor drain adjacent the heat exchanger.

In this way most of the cleaning water and debris are disposed of minimizing the need for cleaning the tube sheet, heat exchanger support beams and the floor below the heat exchanger.

In a modification of the invention, the collection bib and frame are mounted on a moveable stand for placement so as to collect liquid and debris from leaks and drainage of various kinds, and to lead collected material to a suitable drain for disposal.

In another modification of the invention, the collection bib is provided with a deflector panel extending from the rim of the bib and secured to the top side of the heat exchanger for deflecting liquid and debris down into the bib. This modification of the invention is primarily for use at the back side of the heat exchanger where liquid and debris are pushed out of each tube, however, the modification can also be used at

the front side of the heat exchanger where an operator is cleaning tubes.

In another modification of the invention, a collection bib is fitted with an integral deflector hood that is fitted over an exposed tube sheet for deflecting tube effluent down into the bib. This modification is chiefly used at the back side of the heat exchanger.

Specific examples are included in the following description for purposes of clarity, but various details can be changed within the scope of the present invention.

OBJECTS OF THE INVENTION

An object of the invention is to provide an apparatus for collecting and draining away waste-water and debris in a tube cleaning operation.

Another object of the invention is to provide a method for collecting and draining away waste-water and debris in a tube cleaning operation.

Another object of the invention is to provide an apparatus to be positioned as desired on a heat exchanger tube sheet for collecting and draining away waste-water and debris exiting each tube in a cleaning operation.

Another object of the invention is to provide for convenient collection and disposal of liquid and debris from

leaks of various kinds as well as the removal of same from failed equipment and so forth.

Another object of the invention is to provide an apparatus to be positioned on the front side and on the rear side of a heat exchanger tube sheet for collecting and draining away waste-water and debris exiting front and rear ends of each tube in a cleaning operation.

Other and further objects of the invention will become apparent with an understanding of the following detailed description of the invention or upon employment of the invention in practice.

A preferred embodiment of the invention has been chosen for detailed description to enable those having ordinary skill in the art to which the invention appertains to readily understand how to construct and use the invention and is shown in the accompanying drawing in which:

Figure 1 is a schematic view partially in section showing a tube cleaning operation for a shell and tube heat exchanger in which a rotating cleaning brush ejects a column of water and debris from the tube as the brush is being withdrawn from the tube.

Figure 2 is a perspective view of a collection bib and supporting frame set-up for being placed in position on a tube sheet for collecting waste-water and debris during a tube

cleaning operation.

Figure 3 is a fragmentary side elevation view partially in section of the collection bib and supporting frame of Figure 2 in position on a tube sheet.

Figure 4 is a section view taken along line 4-4 of Figure 3.

Figure 5 is a side elevation view of the front side of the supporting frame of Figure 2.

Figure 6 is a perspective view of the collection bib and frame mounted on a tube sheet.

Figure 7 is a perspective view of a modified embodiment of the invention in which a supporting frame and collection bib are carried by a portable stand for deployment as necessary to collect and dispose of leaks from a variety of sources.

Figure 8 is a perspective view of a modified embodiment of the invention in which a collection bib is fitted with deflector panel extending from the rim of the bib and secured to the top side of the heat exchanger for deflecting liquid and debris down into the bib.

Figure 9 is a perspective view of a modified embodiment of the invention in which a collection bib has an integral hood fitted over the top side of a heat exchanger for deflecting liquid and debris flowing from tubes down into a bib.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Referring to the drawing, a shell and tube heat exchanger 10 for commercial and industrial use includes spaced tube sheets 12 supporting the ends of heat exchange tubes 14. The tubes are cleaned by a rotary brush 16 mounted at the end of rotating drive shaft 18 covered by an outer sheath 20. The rotary brush is inserted into each tube with a water flush moving down through the tube to its far end in a cleaning pass, and then being withdrawn by reverse rotation back through the tube. As the brush approaches the near end of the tube, a column of waste flushing water and debris is ejected from the tube for disposal.

An apparatus 22 according to the invention for collection and disposal of waste water and debris during a tube cleaning operation comprises a large flexible impermeable plastic bib 24 in the general shape of a funnel with large entry opening 24a situated below the tube sheet, and with conical body 24b converging into an elongate duct 24c leading waste water and debris to a sewer or drain pipe.

A major portion of the large end of the bib has triangular flaps 24d for securing the bib to a supporting frame 26 which sets up and maintains the large end of the bib in wide open position. The remaining portion of the large end of the bib is defined by a generally straight edge 24e for positioning under a tube sheet so as to collect ejected waste water and debris.

The supporting frame 26 is preferably rectangular in configuration and is defined by front 26a and rear 26b plates, and left 26c and right 26d side plates. As shown in Figures 2, 3 and 5 the front plate 26a includes longitudinal slots 26e and slide mechanisms 28 for conveniently positioning a pair of mounting arms 30 for insertion into tube ends so as to deploy the frame and bib along any given section of the tube sheet as shown in Figure 6.

The mounting arms 30 are preferably tube cleaning brushes of a size appropriate for a cleaning tubes of a given heat exchanger. Preferably the brushes have a spiral pattern of bristles 30a bound by twisted wire spine 30b and a threaded end fitting 30c.

The slide mechanism 28 includes a main body 28a, securing handle 28b, and a mounting arm or brush receptacle 28c. The main body and brush receptacle are fitted together by a threaded link 28d passing through the frame slot 26e and may be moved along the slot to a desired position and locked in place by loosening and tightening the threaded link. Mounting brushes are fitted to the brush receptacles by a straightforward threaded connection 30c.

The lower edge of the front plate 26a (Fig 3) has a forwardly projecting flange 26f that abuts a tube sheet 12 for proper positioning of the frame with respect to the tube sheet.

The upper edge of the front plate has an oblique flange 26g for positioning a flexible blade 32 along the tube sheet as an aid in collecting tube effluent.

Each of the side plates 26c-d of the frame includes a pair of slots 26h through which the bib triangular flaps 24d are threaded as shown in Figure 4 so as to secure the bib in wide open position to the support frame.

The support frame may be fabricated of any suitable lightweight material such as aluminum, plastic and the like.

For a tube cleaning operation, a bib is fitted to the support frame and the free ends of the mounting arms are placed in tube ends so as to position the bib under a section of tube sheet selected for tube cleaning. Tubes are cleaned by passing a rotary brush and water flush into each tube. An exiting brush ejects a column of waste-water and debris into the bib. The bib passes the waste-water and debris through duct to a floor drain. The frame and bib are repositioned along the tube sheet as necessary for cleaning all of the tubes in the heat exchanger. After a cleaning operation, the bib is removed from the frame and discarded.

Figure 7 illustrates a modified embodiment of the invention in which the supporting frame 26 and collection bib 24 of Figures 1-6 is mounted to a portable stand 34 having a wheeled lower frame 34a with a horizontal cross-bar 34b and a vertical

support post 34c. The vertical post includes a clamping device 34d at its upper end for receiving and securing a collection bib in its supporting frame. The stand is placed as desired to collect liquids and related debris and to direct the collected material to a suitable disposal outlet such as a floor drain through the bib outlet duct.

Another modification of the invention is shown in Figure 8 in which the collection bib 24 is provided with a deflector panel 24f extending from the upper rim 24g of the bib and secured to the top side of the heat exchanger 10 for deflecting liquid and debris down into the bib. The deflector panel is held in operating position by any suitable means 38 such as magnets or ties. This modification of the invention is primarily for use at the back side of the heat exchanger where liquid and debris are pushed out of the back end of each tube, however, the modification can also be used at the front side of the heat exchanger where an operator is cleaning tubes.

Another modification of the invention is shown in Figure 9 in which a collection bib 24 is fitted with an integral deflector hood 24h that is fitted over an exposed tube sheet 12 for deflecting tube effluent down into the bib. The deflector hood is one-piece with the collection bib extending from bib rim 24g to peripheral edge 24j providing an impermeable hood that deflects fluid and debris down into the bib. The peripheral edge

24j of the deflector hood fits over the heat exchanger flange 10a thereby positioning the hood in operation. This modification is chiefly used at the back side of the heat exchanger.

Various changes may be made to the structure embodying the principles of the invention. The foregoing embodiments are set forth in an illustrative and not in a limiting sense. The scope of the invention is defined by the claims appended hereto.